

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1-28. (Canceled)

29. (New) A method of providing fee-based access to grid computing resources available to a plurality of users, comprising:

receiving a request from a requesting entity;

determining a completion time criterion specified for the request, wherein the completion time criterion defines at least a maximum acceptable time to complete the request;

performing the request using the grid computing resources; wherein performing the request comprises producing results responsive to the request;

in response to completing the request in less than the maximum acceptable time to complete the request defined by the completion time criterion, delaying returning the results to the requesting entity for a period of time;

after a lapse of the period of time, returning the results to the requesting entity;
and

determining a time-based price to be charged for performing the request; wherein determining the time-based price to be charged comprises accessing a tiered pricing schedule from which the price is determined based on response time, wherein the tiered pricing schedule specifies a decreasing price to be charged for the request with at least one of: (i) an increasing response time, and (ii) increasing request processing time; wherein the tiered pricing schedule is an element of a customer service contract.

30. (New) The method of claim 29, wherein determining the time-based price to be charged for performing the request is based on a span of time calculated from receiving the request to returning the results.

31. (New) The method of claim 29, wherein the completion time criterion defines a minimum acceptable time to complete the request, and wherein delaying returning the

results is done only after first determining that the amount of time needed to perform the request is greater than the minimum acceptable time and less than the maximum acceptable time.

32. (New) The method of claim 29, wherein returning the results occurs before a lapse of the maximum acceptable time as calculated from receiving the request.

33. (New) A system comprising:
grid computing resources; and
a request manager, stored on a computer readable storage medium, configured to:

receive a request for results;
determine a completion time criterion specified for the request, wherein the completion time criterion defines at least a maximum acceptable time to complete the request;
route the request to an appropriate resource of the grid computing resources to perform the request;
upon completion of the request by the appropriate resource, determine a total elapsed time since receiving the request;
determine whether the total elapsed time is less than the maximum acceptable time to complete the request defined by the completion time criterion;
in response to determining that the total elapsed time is less than the maximum acceptable time to complete the request defined by the completion time criterion, delay returning the results to the requesting entity for a period of time; and
determine a price to be charged for processing the request based on an amount of time needed to process the request and return the results after the delay.

34. (New) The system of claim 33, wherein the completion time criterion defines a minimum acceptable time to complete the request, and wherein the request manager is

configured to delay returning the results only if the amount of time needed to perform the request is greater than the minimum acceptable time and less than the maximum acceptable time.

35. (New) The system of claim 33, wherein returning the results occurs before a lapse of the maximum acceptable time as calculated from receiving the request.

36. (New) The system of claim 33, further comprising a database containing at least one tiered pricing schedule defining different prices to be charged for processing requests based on time and wherein the request manager is configured to access the at least one tier pricing schedule to determine the price for processing the request.

37. (New) The system of claim 36, wherein the tiered pricing schedule specifies a decreasing price with to be charged for each request with at least one of: (i) an increasing request processing time and (ii) an increasing request response time.

38. (New) The system of claim 36, wherein the tiered pricing schedule is an element of a customer service contract.

39. (New) A method of providing fee-based access to grid computing resources available to a plurality of users, comprising:

receiving a plurality of requests from a requesting entity;

determining a completion time criterion specified for each request, wherein the completion time criterion defines at least a maximum acceptable time to complete the request;

for each request processed until a predefined threshold is met:

(i) performing the request using the grid computing resources; wherein performing the request comprises producing results responsive to the request;

(ii) returning the results to the requesting entity without imposing an intentional delay;

for each request processed after the predefined threshold is met:

(i) performing the request using the grid computing resources; wherein performing the request comprises producing results responsive to the request;

(ii) in response to completing the request in less than the maximum acceptable time defined by the completion time criterion, delaying returning the results to the requesting entity for a period of time; and

(iii) after a lapse of the period of time, returning the results to the requesting entity; wherein the predefined threshold is a predefined number of requests that must be returned to the requesting entity in less than the maximum acceptable time according to a contract provision of a customer service contract; and

determining a time-based price to be charged for performing each request; wherein determining the time-based price to be charged comprises accessing a tiered pricing schedule from which the price is determined based on response time, wherein the tiered pricing schedule specifies a decreasing price to be charged for the request with at least one of: (i) an increasing response time, and (ii) increasing request processing time; wherein the tiered pricing schedule is an element of the customer service contract.

40. (New) The method of claim 39, wherein the period of time of delay is randomized for different requests.